



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS  
IN EDUCATION

## INSPECTING SUBJECTS AND ASPECTS 11-18

### HISTORY

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# INSPECTING HISTORY

## INTRODUCTION

As an inspector of history, you need to find out how good the pupils are at the subject, to what extent they understand what lies at its heart, and whether it captures their interest. You are likely to be able to explain your findings largely by evaluating the rate at which they progress and judging how stimulating and effective the teaching is.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

These are the main questions which your inspection should answer.

- How high are the standards in history, and are they high enough?
- How well are pupils progressing?
- How well is history taught?

### Before you begin your inspection in the school

- Revise your knowledge of the *Handbook* and associated guidance.
- Where necessary, make sure that you are familiar with the particular course objectives and examination syllabuses used by the school.

*You should already have a good knowledge of the National Curriculum Programme of Study for history and the level descriptions.*

- Analyse the performance data, to form a view of the standards achieved in recent years and any trends, and to establish hypotheses about strengths and weaknesses in history.
- Study any departmental documentation which has been made available, and evaluate its potential contribution to the quality of teaching and its coverage of curricular requirements.

### When you are in the school

- Use the first-hand evidence from observation of lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking with them to assess what the current pupils are like at the subject, what they do well, and where they could do better. Focus on the current pupils in the year groups in which they become 14,16 and 18. Refer to the records of teachers' assessments of pupils' work. Assess what progress pupils are making through the school - how rapid it is, on how wide a front and in what depth.
- Observe teaching, talk with teachers about their work, look at their plans and records, and judge how effective the teaching is - how it contributes to pupils' attitudes to learning, progress and standards. See which approaches work well and which are unsuccessful.

- Take stock of any other factors which affect the teaching of history and the standards achieved. In particular, assess how effectively the subject is led and managed.
- Make sure that your observation forms contain enough evidence to support your judgements; telling examples are needed for your subject report.

### **Literacy and information technology**

- Judge the contribution of history to pupils' reading and writing.
- Evaluate any contribution which history makes to pupils' capability in information technology.
- Where information and communications technology is used to support pupils' learning in history, evaluate the extent to which it enhances the pupils' standards of work. Whilst the pupils may be working well below their competence in information technology, this may still be appropriate to the history task.
- Record your evidence and evaluations in the 'Other significant evidence' section of the observation form.

### **Feeding back your inspection findings**

- Feed back your findings clearly and helpfully to the head of history and to the individual teachers by:
  - identifying the most important strengths and weaknesses in the teaching, and supporting your assessments with illustrations from the lessons you have seen;
  - giving convincing reasons for what you judge to be successful or otherwise, making clear how the teaching affects what is achieved;
  - showing the head of department how other factors, particularly leadership and management, affect the quality of teaching and the standards achieved;
  - ensuring that there is opportunity to discuss the findings and that points for development are identified.

### **Writing the subject section**

The history section of the report should tell a coherent and convincing story. It should explain why the standards achieved are as they are. In particular, you should evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the teaching. The following questions will help you to check the quality of your reporting.

- Are test and examination results interpreted so as to give a clear view of the standards attained, to show how they compare with other subjects in the school, and to identify any trends over time?

- Are there clear judgements of what is achieved by the pupils in the years in which they become 14, 16 and 18? Are the strong and weak features identified in the different aspects of the subject?
- Is there a convincing explanation of any significant differences between what is seen and what results indicate?
- Are variations in the progress of different groups or in different years evaluated and explained?
- Does the evaluation of teaching spell out how it affects the pupils' response and what they achieve? Is it clear which teaching methods are successful and which are not? Is there an explanation of any other factors, such as leadership and management, which are significant in affecting standards?
- Is it clear how far standards and teaching have improved since the last inspection and are reasons given?
- Are the main judgements supported by the most telling examples?
- Is it clear what needs to be done to improve standards in history?

## ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESS

Your judgements on attainment and progress in history will be based on performance **data** and direct **observations** in the school. Any differences between the judgements based on them **must be explained convincingly**.

### Interpreting data

- For pupils aged 16, compare the school's GCSE results with:
  - the results achieved in schools nationally;
  - the results for schools of 'similar type' (comprehensive, selective or modern);
  - the results achieved in other subjects in the school.

*The comparisons with other subjects are indications whether standards are as high as they should be. You need to consider the proportion of those studying the subject who have attained a GCSE grade either in full or in short courses and the overall grade distribution.*

*In interpreting results, you may need to refer to matters such as a change in the syllabus, the nature of the year group, or the number of pupils involved. You should also be alert to the school's curriculum and entry policies.*

- Evaluate the A-level and AS results, comparing them with national results, including those for schools of similar type. Look at results over several years and take account of performance in GCSE and any value-added measures.

*In making your judgements, you will need to **exercise caution** because of the various factors at play, such as the numbers involved and the nature of the students and courses.*

### Using evidence from observations

- Evaluate the attainment of pupils by the age of 14 in relation to what is typical according to the evidence of the 'key elements' developed through the National Curriculum 'study units'. For pupils in the year groups in which they become 16 and 18, judge their attainment according to the objectives of the courses which they follow.

*It is not necessary in each study unit to develop all the key elements of chronology, the extent of historical understanding and knowledge, interpretations of history, historical enquiry and organisation, and communication. **However, significant weaknesses in any aspect compared with others mean that standards overall cannot be high enough.***

- For current pupils in the year group in which they become 14, use teachers' assessment alongside your observations as an indicator of attainment.
- Judge the **progress** which pupils make in each year, referring to any significant differences between particular groups, such as able pupils, those with special educational needs, and boys and girls.

*The evidence comes from talking with pupils, looking at their written work and seeing how they get on in lessons - how much do they learn and at what rate?*

*For pupils with special educational needs, including those in special schools, judgements on standards, particularly progress, should be made taking into account their best means of communicating - for example, by computer or other form of technology. There may be a need for pupils to do work pitched at levels lower than is normally associated with their age.*

- **Look at** pupils' current and previous written work, including their notes and any project work such as historical investigations.

*This should give evidence of the knowledge, understanding and skills which pupils show, their confidence in communicating them, and the progress which they make. There may also be evidence of their ability to make links and connections and to apply the skills learnt in one context to another.*

- **Listen to pupils' discussions in class and group work and talk with them** about the work that they are currently undertaking and their past work, to probe what they know and can do and the progress they make in knowledge, understanding and skills.
- **As you look at pupils' work, observe them in lessons and talk to them**, use evidence of the extent to which they can:
  - demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the events, people and periods studied and place them within a chronological framework;

- understand concepts such as change and causation;
- use dates, terms and conventions that describe historical periods and the passing of time;
- analyse the characteristic features of particular periods of past societies;
- describe, analyse and explain historical events, situations and changes;
- develop overviews of the main events and changes, making links between study units and between local, British, European and world history;
- assess the significance of the main events, people and changes studied;
- understand how and why some historical events, people, situations and changes have been interpreted differently;
- analyse and evaluate interpretations;
- investigate independently using a range of sources;
- ask and answer significant questions, evaluate sources in their historical context, identify sources for an investigation, collect and record information and reach conclusions;
- recall, select and organise historical information, applying their knowledge, understanding and skills to new contexts;
- organise knowledge and understanding of history through the accurate selection and deployment of terms necessary to describe and explain the periods and topics studied;
- cross-refer between themes or periods, and where appropriate demonstrate the relevance of what they have studied to current events;
- communicate their knowledge and understanding of history through a range of techniques - for example, by telling a narrative, explaining an event, or presenting a historical argument.

*These attributes will help you to shape your analysis of strengths and weaknesses in history as well as your overall judgement about standards. Remember that in your reporting you need to go further than citing the attributes; draw on the most telling evidence which exemplifies them.*

## **PUPILS' ATTITUDES TO LEARNING**

- See how far the pupils show the following characteristics:
  - attention and concentration - for example, in listening to the telling or reading of a narrative, or in studying the detail of source materials;
  - willingness to read both non-fiction and historical fiction and, increasingly as they move through the school, to read at length and widely;

- critical curiosity in posing and responding to questions about history;
- enjoyment and perseverance in historical enquiry;
- a capacity to empathise with people in the past, to understand their motives and their responses to the events and changes which affected their lives;
- respect for historical evidence and acceptance that conclusions must be tentative;
- high expectations in the completion and presentation of work, including the use of information and communications technology, where relevant.

## TEACHING

- Judge the quality of teaching by weighing its strengths and weaknesses according to the criteria in the *Framework*, and assess its **impact on educational standards**. Effective history teaching is founded on a secure command of the subject, a clear understanding of the discipline of history and high expectations of what pupils can achieve.

*Teaching cannot be satisfactory where pupils, or a significant minority of them, learn less than you would expect considering what they already knew. The same is true where they do not firmly consolidate their learning.*

- Inform your views by reference to the characteristics of effective history teaching, in which the teacher:
  - provides historical content which is accurate and reflects up-to-date knowledge and understanding of the periods, events, personalities and movements in the history being studied (*subject knowledge*);
  - tells a good story well, exploring, for example, the sequence of events, the patterns of causation or the impact of change; encouraging pupils to listen carefully and critically (*subject knowledge, methodology, planning, expectations*);
  - ensures that pupils develop an accumulating 'mind map' of the past, and that they are able to place past events in their correct sequence, identify their relative distance from the present and make effective historical links and comparisons (*subject knowledge, methodology, planning, expectations, assessment*);
  - encourages pupils to ask historical questions such as: 'Why did these people settle here?' 'When did they settle?' 'What problems did they face?' 'How complete is our picture of what happened?' 'How do we know?' (*methodology, planning, expectations, homework*);
  - demonstrates care and sensitivity in the handling of the controversial moral and philosophical issues which arise in history, while nonetheless extending pupils' horizons and awareness (*subject knowledge, methodology, expectations*);



- enables pupils to understand what it is to be a 'historian', to recognise the different interpretations of history and the insights that history provides (*subject knowledge, expectations*);
  - develops effective explanations of historical events, concepts and methodology which enable pupils to progress in understanding difficult historical ideas and controversies. For example, 'Why did Hitler do A rather than B?' 'How can these two conflicting eye witness accounts be reconciled?' (*subject knowledge, methodology, planning, expectations, homework*);
  - ensures there is an effective balance between imparting information to pupils, directing them to historical sources and instructing them in their use, and encouraging pupils to enquire on their own account;
  - responds to pupils' questions with an insight and depth of historical knowledge and understanding which advances pupils' knowledge and stimulates their interest in history (*subject knowledge, methodology, expectations*);
  - provides access to a range of resources - for example, primary and secondary sources, libraries, information and communication technology, historical sites, documents, audio-visual materials and media, artefacts, simulations, role play, oral accounts, guest speakers and visits, to stimulate and extend pupils' thinking and responses (*subject knowledge, methodology, planning*);
  - presents pupils with tasks in lessons and for homework which enable them to make progress in communicating their knowledge and understanding and in exercising their skills (*expectations, planning, methodology*);
  - uses pupils' responses, both in lessons and from planned assessments, to gauge how far the intended learning has taken place, so as to identify weaknesses which require further attention and to provide feedback to pupils on their work (*assessment*).
- Make sure that you recognise the lack of challenge and limited effectiveness of teaching which:
- does not ensure that pupils use historical terminology correctly;
  - fails to make links and connections between and across periods of history - for example, neglecting to make the contrasts and comparisons which are important in developing conceptual understanding;
  - omits to give due weight to some study units or particular key elements - for example, giving insufficient time to non-European units or little attention to interpretations of history;
  - over-emphasises the taking and making of notes: this may limit the development of concepts and insufficiently promote the historical enquiry and controversy which, particularly at A-level, make for quality in history teaching;

- requires pupils to undertake restricted tasks: for example, copying, answering sequences of closed questions and applying a formulaic approach to the use of sources are all unlikely to develop historical understanding;
- provides insufficient opportunities for all pupils to work to their capability, especially in in-depth studies such as individual investigations;
- relies on a single textbook or on a series of photocopied sheets, so adopting a uniformity of approach which fails to do justice to the richness and variety of the subject.

## **OTHER ASPECTS OF PROVISION OR MANAGEMENT**

### **Curriculum**

- Be alert to the contribution which other subjects make to standards in history.

*For example, pupils can gain much from novels and poetry, from the work of artists and musicians, from studies such as settlement in geography and from the moral and ethical issues raised in religious education.*

### **Literacy**

- Judge the contribution which history makes to the development of **literacy**.

*History can make a significant contribution to pupils' literacy through the prominent exercise of skills in reading and writing.*

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

- Judge the contribution which history makes to pupils' understanding of the cultural traditions of the United Kingdom, of the development of multi-cultural Britain, and of other European and world cultures.

### **Citizenship**

- Judge how far history helps pupils to understand citizenship by providing them with:
  - a knowledge and understanding of the development of political systems;
  - the necessary critical skills from their study of events and their interpretations, and from the evaluation of source materials, to help them make their own rational decisions and judgements.

*The study of change and continuity, cause and effect, is transferable to modern situations.*

### **Other contributions**

- Judge the contribution which history makes to other courses such as personal and social education and humanities and general studies in the sixth form.

### **OBSERVATION FORMS**

There follow two sample observation forms for history. These are intended to show how evidence and judgements contribute to a coherent picture of attainment in these history lessons. In one lesson, the teaching is judged to be 'very good' (grade 2) and in the other it is considered 'satisfactory' (grade 4).

### **HISTORY YEAR 8 MIXED ABILITY - Very good teaching**

<b>CONTEXT:</b> Production of a drill book for use in the English Civil War. Lesson started with an extract from the film "Cromwell", featuring the battle of Edgehill. Class organised into ability groups for the activity.
<b>TEACHING:</b> Planning strength evident in linking battle scene to previous work and stating clear objectives for the lesson. Excellent methodology: clear and effective introduction to the film including discussion of its value as an historical source; v effective organisation of the exercise into stages, helpful instructions and the issue of differentiated resources, so as to be manageable by pupils. Effective intervention in group work to maintain pace and challenge pupils' thinking, for example a pike versus musket, where CT's subject knowledge very strong. Good management of time throughout. Provided very good support to pupils with SEN. Homework set on a plan of the battle as an integral part of the work. Grade 2
<b>RESPONSE:</b> Ps enthusiastic, fully involved in the task and clearly enjoying the topic. Able to work in groups cooperatively, for example sharing resources such as eye witness accounts and drawing out a range of ideas in discussion. Reference and research skills were developing naturally from the wide range of material being used with responsibility and independence. Very well behaved throughout. Grade 2
<b>ATTAINMENT:</b> Indicative of L4 - 6 across the key elements. Some lower attainers struggled with technical terminology such as "arquebus" and "caracole", but several of the most able could comment on the anachronisms evident at one stage in the film. In reflecting on the film, pupils showed good understanding of the motives and conditions of the common foot soldier in the Civil War. In the group work all were able to interrogate successfully a number of different sources to obtain information for the drill book. Grade 3
<b>PROGRESS:</b> Ps acquiring a detailed knowledge of 17th century methods of fighting and can discuss changes in warfare with increasing confidence. Pupils used their previous knowledge of the weapons to discuss the technical details of combat and develop understanding of how the tactics used in field warfare evolved. Majority were well placed to complete the task for homework. All ability groups were being challenged with work which significantly extended their learning - as a result of the stimulus of the film and the well targeted group activities. Grade 2

### **HISTORY YEAR 10 MIXED ABILITY - Satisfactory teaching**

<b>CONTEXT:</b> Russian Revolution. Second lesson in a GCSE revision sequence. Use of different sources for comparison and deduction, identifying issues, conducting historical enquiry and contrasting interpretations. Work in pairs.
<b>TEACHING:</b> Good planning - well structured in manageable steps, supported by a range of useful resources. Methodology sound - an appropriate balance of reading of source texts, discussion and board work - but uninspiring - recap and introductory exposition rather dull and lacking sparkle. Good subject knowledge evident in clear and helpful instructions and explanations on the use of the historical sources. Sound management and expectations of discipline. Assessment technique weak with little feedback or praise to support and motivate. A slow pace with no urgency or excitement, but a challenging homework set to secure ps' knowledge and extend their thinking on the roles of Lenin and Trotsky. Grade 4
<b>RESPONSE:</b> Quiet and mostly involved in the work throughout. Behaviour satisfactory, and concentration sustained during paired discussion of the sources. Appropriate responses to untargeted verbal questioning, but no initiative demonstrated and no dialogue generated. Boys less enthusiastic than girls, but responded when prompted. Grade 4
<b>ATTAINMENT:</b> Sound knowledge of the key facts of the revolutions, with satisfactory understanding of its causes and some of its implications. Most produced a detailed time line, but some lower attainers required more time and further support from the teacher. Higher attainers detected bias in sources dependent on the author and were able to give reasonable explanations and justifications for this. Potential grades B-D with two at E. Grade 4
<b>PROGRESS:</b> Mainly consolidation of knowledge of events of the 1917 Revolution, but some good progress in use of evidence which led to discussion of differing interpretations of the revolution amongst some higher attainers. The language level of some sources caused difficulties for some lower attainers and limited their progress. This was reflected in their files. Grade 4

## ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This is one of a set of booklets which make up *Inspecting subjects and aspects 11-18*. The set consists of:

- an introductory booklet, *General guidance*, which is for all inspectors who evaluate the work of secondary age pupils - it is mainly about inspecting subjects;
- separate booklets on inspecting specific subjects and aspects; the contents page of *General guidance* shows the subjects and aspects which have booklets.

The main points in the *General guidance* are summarised in each subject, but if you are inspecting the work of secondary age pupils you should read the introductory booklet so that you are fully in the picture of what you have to do.

The contents of all the booklets are on the Internet and can be accessed from OFSTED's website [<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>]. This will allow you to obtain guidance for individual subjects or aspects.

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